

PINELLAS COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

December 20, 2017

The Pinellas County Tourist Development Council (TDC), as created under Pinellas County Ordinance 78-20 pursuant to Section 125.0104, Florida Statutes, met in regular session in the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Assembly Room, 315 Court Street, Fifth Floor, Clearwater, Florida, on this date at 9:00 A.M. with the following members present:

Members Present

Janet C. Long, BCC Chairman, Chair  
Russ Kimball, Sheraton Sand Key Resort, Vice-Chair  
Doug Bevis, City of Oldsmar Mayor  
Jen Carlisle, Clearwater Marine Aquarium  
George Cretekos, City of Clearwater Mayor  
Charlie Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilman  
Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises  
Joanne “Cookie” Kennedy, City of Indian Rocks Beach Vice-Mayor  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry  
Eric Waltz, Sandpearl Resort

Not Present:

Timothy Bogott, TradeWinds Island Resorts  
Anthony Satterfield, Alden Suites

Others Present

David Downing, Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Tim Ramsberger, Chief Operating Officer  
Teri Tuxhorn, Administrative Director  
Leroy Bridges, Media and Interactive Director  
Liz McCann, Executive Administrative Assistant  
Michael Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Other Interested Individuals  
Jenny Masinovsky, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk  
*Minutes by Tony Fabrizio*

Agenda

- I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL – TDC Chair Janet C. Long
- II. APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – Meeting of November 15, 2017
- III. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- IV. COUNTY ATTORNEY REPORT
- V. DISCUSSION OF THE TDT USE FOR TRANSIT SYSTEM – TDC Chair Janet C. Long
- VI. VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT – David Downing
  - A. Financial Statements (Pinellas County Bed Tax)
  - B. Miscellaneous
  - C. Research Data Services – David Downing
    - i. October Visitor Profile – Report on file
- VII. DEPARTMENT UPDATES – October 2017
  - A. 2018 Marketing Presentation
    - i. Tim Ramsberger – Organizational Update
    - ii. David Downing – Marketing & Research
    - iii. Leroy Bridges – Digital/Web
  - \*All department reports on file
- VIII. INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS REPORTS – October 2017
  - A. St. Petersburg/Clearwater International Airport – Report on file
  - B. Tampa International Airport – Report on file
- IX. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS
- X. ADJOURNMENT

All documents and presentations provided to the Clerk’s Office have been made a part of the record.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Long called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M.; whereupon, she wished everyone a Merry Christmas and noted the presence of a quorum despite the excused absences of Messrs. Bogott and Satterfield. At her request, those at the dais introduced themselves.

MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 15, 2017 MEETING – APPROVED

Councilman Gerdes moved, seconded by Vice-Mayor Kennedy and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the meeting of November 15, 2017 be approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT – NONE

COUNTY ATTORNEY REPORT – NONE

DISCUSSION OF THE TDT USE FOR TRANSIT SYSTEM

Chair Long referred to a Florida Attorney General Advisory Legal Opinion, included in the agenda packet, and indicated that it supports her belief that Section 125.0104(5)(a)3 of the Florida Statutes permits using proceeds from the Tourist Development Tax, also known as the bed tax, to fund tourism-specific transit projects.

Referring to a previous discussion pertaining to a bill by Senator Jeff Brandes proposing expansion of the allowable use of the bed tax, and citing the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line from Downtown St. Petersburg to St. Pete Beach, Chair Long expressed her support for expanding the BRT network to include service between Tampa International Airport and Clearwater Beach; whereupon, she requested input from the members in advance of her meeting later today with Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) Chief Executive Officer Brad Miller, and they responded as follows:

- Mr. Waltz questioned whether the service would be widely used and how the passengers would be transported from the beach terminus to their hotels. Chair Long suggested that shuttle vans rather than buses could be used from the airport, and they could stop directly at the hotels; whereupon, Mr. Waltz noted that such a service is already provided by the private carrier SuperShuttle and expressed concern that regularly scheduled shuttle vans would get stuck in beach traffic during peak hours.
- Mr. Kimball commented that express public transit of that type works best when a convention center serves multiple hotels attracting individual travelers rather than families. He suggested that a study be conducted to determine whether the service would benefit all of Clearwater Beach, including Sand Key, but opined that sufficient transportation is already available through SuperShuttle, Uber, auto rentals, golf carts, the Jolley Trolley, and existing and planned PSTA bus service. Chair Long noted that transportation is evolving quickly and cited a pilot program for autonomous vehicles that Hillsborough County is attempting to start, adding that PSTA has an opportunity to also have autonomous shuttles in north county and downtown St. Petersburg.

- Vice-Mayor Kennedy noted that she serves on the Forward Pinellas Board and opined that the biggest transportation challenge on the beaches is congestion, relating that various studies are ongoing; and that there needs to be collaboration between the PSTA, Forward Pinellas, and the TDC/VSPC to ensure that the agencies are working on solutions together. Chair Long indicated that discussions are in the works to schedule a joint workshop with the entities.
- Mayor Cretekos opined that the Tampa Bay area is less suitable than other cities for public transportation such as light rail; and that the biggest contributors to Clearwater Beach congestion are “day-trippers,” including the many employees who serve tourists. He suggested that a better use of public dollars would be to find a way to get employees to leave their cars on the mainland and take public transportation to the beach; whereupon, responding to query by Chair Long, he indicated that he would be open to exploring a system of autonomous vehicles that cycled between the mainland and beach.
- Mayor Bevis noted that he has served on the PSTA Board and also serves on the Forward Pinellas Board; whereupon, he concurred with Mr. Kimball that a transit study could make sense, and commented that he could envision a shuttle that would use Clearwater Mall as a hub to transport workers to the beach; and that many of the area’s tourists are from Europe and are not accustomed to driving on the other side of the road or on a roundabout like that on Clearwater Beach, and maybe tourism dollars should be used to transport them. Mayor Cretekos opined that it is the locals who have trouble with the roundabout; and that it is safer than the intersection it replaced.
- Councilman Gerdes commented that in anticipation of Senator Brandes’ bill being successful, the TDC should be prepared to establish the nexus between any proposed project and the advancement of tourism; whereupon, he questioned whether any supporting data is being collected, and Chair Long indicated that it is. Citing the success of the Central Avenue Trolley in St. Petersburg in helping employees commute to work, he concurred with Mayor Cretekos that a better tourism-related transit project in Clearwater would be to help beach employees commute and relieve congestion.
- Ms. Carlisle concurred with the points made by other members, emphasized the importance of collaboration and conducting good research, and expressed support for transit projects that move visitors within the destination over an express service to and from the airport. Noting that private entities are already providing such service, she opined that redundancies should not be created for the sake of obtaining tax dollars.

Chair Long thanked the members for their input, noted the shift that is occurring at all levels of government in how public dollars are being spent, and expressed hope that the next TDC Chairman will schedule a workshop to discuss tourism-related transportation issues, and additional discussion ensued.

Mr. Kimball related that his property, the Sheraton Sand Key Resort, subscribes to PSTA's corporate pass (C-Pass) program, which allows employees and hotel guests to ride the agency's buses for free, and it is working. Ms. Rodriguez commented that it is a challenge to get hoteliers to see the value in a program employees will not commit to using, and related that one of the aims of the Clearwater Ferry was to take beach employee traffic off the Clearwater Memorial Causeway, but as the program grew, participation steadily dropped off. Chairman Long questioned whether the TDC should be doing more to educate the public about available transportation options; whereupon, Ms. Carlisle opined that VSPC/TDC's role is to attract visitors to the destination rather than ensure they have a great experience once they arrive, and Mr. Henderson opined that coming up with a transit solution that suits everyone's needs would be cost-prohibitive because the area is so spread out.

Mr. Downing commented that VSPC heavily promotes the transportation options within the county and to and from the airports through its magazine, social media, videos and other outreach; and that until such time that the options change, nothing can be done from a promotional aspect.

## VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

### Tourism Economics Presentation

Messrs. Downing and Bridges conducted a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Economics Snapshot* and related that part of the data being shown was obtained through a new contract with Smith Travel, explaining that the relationship will help VSPC build on the tourism and visitation information it has historically obtained through Research Data Services by taking advantage of technology advances to capture more granular metrics.

In reviewing the data, Mr. Bridges, with input by Mr. Downing, highlighted the following:

- Smith Travel does not collect information from all mom and pop hotels, but its data provides a good snapshot of visitation.

- The information contains a new category for rooms sold, and that provides a more useful barometer of the health of the industry than occupancy, since occupancy is a percentage rather than a fixed number.
- The data shows that rooms sold, average daily rate, and revenue per available room are up across the board for the calendar year, and all are outpacing the state and national averages.
- Bed tax collections are on a record pace and likely will approach \$55 million for the year.
- As Airbnb becomes more established and contributes more substantially to the bed tax, VSPC will be able to capture related metrics through a company that specializes in that market.

Responding to query by Councilman Gerdes, Mr. Bridges confirmed an error in the 2017 Year to Date PowerPoint slide and thanked him for the correction. Responding to queries by Mr. Henderson, Messrs. Downing and Bridges indicated that the data from Smith Travel dovetails with a previous discussion pertaining to acquiring different metrics from another research company, and staff will provide more information in January; that metrics will be pulled from multiple sources going forward; that the numbers shown today are only from hotels that submitted information to Smith Travel; and that today's presentation is the first step in providing much more information than was available previously.

### Financial Statements

Citing data provided by the Tax Collector, Mr. Downing related that bed tax collections were up 11.14 percent in October 2017 over October 2016.

### DEPARTMENT UPDATES

#### 2018 Marketing Presentation

Mr. Downing related that VSPC held its annual marketing meeting in both downtown St. Petersburg and Clearwater Beach this year to cut down on drive time for the attendees; that the presentation was pared to one hour based on feedback from previous meetings; and that an informal version will be presented today.

Thereupon, staff conducted a PowerPoint presentation titled *Annual Marketing Meeting* that included an Organizational Update, Marketing and Research, and Digital/Web, and Messrs.

Downing, Ramsberger, and Bridges responded to comments and queries by the members throughout the discussion.

Organizational Update

Mr. Ramsberger conducted the Organizational Update portion of the presentation and related that VSPC is an offshoot of Pinellas County Government; that unlike many Convention and Visitors Bureaus and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), it operates under the Sunshine Law; and that it has a lean and efficient staff of 45 members for its 11 departments; whereupon, he recognized staff members and highlighted the following:

- The former Sports Commission was reorganized and rebranded this year as Sports and Events to better reflect the breadth of its purpose to also include Programming and Business Development, Activations and Promotions, and Marketing.
- Through the programming commitment, VSPC supports more than 125 events throughout the year for \$90 million in economic impact, returning approximately 75 percent of its incentive budget to the local economy.
- The Activations and Promotions team fills a void that existed with respect to promoting the destination locally, has a new VSPC-themed van at its disposal, and will be at more than 60 local events during 2018.
- The Elite Event Funding Program will provide support for 12 events in Fiscal Year 2017-2018, and the program will operate under revised guidelines next year.
- The Capital Project Funding Program completed its first cycle, and more than \$80 million in funding was committed. That program will also operate under new guidelines going forward, and staff in January will present the TDC with a proposed timeline for the next round of funding in 2019.
- Beach nourishment is VSPC's most important commitment because of the importance of the beaches to tourism, and five percent of its budget is devoted to it as part of a program that includes matching federal and state funds.

Responding to query by Chair Long and comments by other members, Mr. Ramsberger, with input by Mr. Downing, indicated that staff has expressed its displeasure to the owners of the *Bad Boy Mowers Gasparilla Bowl* college football game pertaining to its new title; and that VSPC

substantially reduced its financial support this year to approximately to \$40,000, based somewhat on the brand, but primarily on the anticipated benefits and return on investment.

Responding to queries by Mayor Bevis, Mr. Ramsberger related that the TDC and BCC approved funding in “up to” amounts under the Elite Event Funding Program this year, and the actual amounts provided were determined through meetings and negotiations; that a cash flow chart for Capital Project Funding commitments can be provided once the contract with the City of Dunedin for the Toronto Blue Jays spring training facility is finalized; and that Real Estate Management will oversee the administration of those contracts.

Mayor Cretkos noted that he and Vice-Mayor Kennedy serve on the Barrier Islands Governmental Council (Big-C) and discussed the difficulty the County has had in obtaining perpetual public access easements from some beach property owners, which are required by the Army Corps of Engineering for federal support of the beach nourishment program; whereupon, Chair Long commented that the situation is problematic, and Vice-Mayor Kennedy indicated that elected federal representatives are planning to meet with property owners who have not signed.

Chair Long indicated that VSPC should not initiate the next Capital Project Funding Program cycle until after the Legislature decides whether it is going to revise the bed tax statute in the upcoming session; whereupon, Mr. Ramsberger related that staff is considering a March or April application process, and Chair Long stated that the session will end in March.

### Marketing and Research

Mr. Downing conducted the Marketing and Research portion of the presentation and provided information regarding the following:

- Growth of the bed tax over six consecutive years, and the impact of the additional sixth cent.
- The research upon which marketing and advertising decisions are based.
- Advertising that features big, bold branding and promotes all of the county’s tourism destinations.
- Orlando as the No. 1 provider of visitation to the market and VSPC’s marketing efforts there.
- Possible competition from a high-speed train that will run between Orlando and Miami.
- New York as the No. 2 provider of visitation.
- Atlanta, Miami, and Philadelphia as markets of opportunity.
- VSPC’s partnership with iHeart Media.
- Marketing efforts at Tampa International Airport and St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport.
- Domestic and international airline and departure airport advertising.

- National brand partnership contests.
- VSPC's partnership with Brand USA, America's DMO, covering all international marketing plans.
- Local transit advertising, and VSPC's working relationship with PSTA.
- In-state print advertising.
- A new outreach program through Travelzoo.
- Advertising on connected television, such as Hulu, to capture people who are abandoning cable television.
- The international markets, including weather advertising in Canada and the focus on Latin America.
- China being on pace to become the top market for visitation to the United States by 2020.
- The role of *Gulf to Bay* destination magazine and plans for an insert in the *Toronto Star*.
- A planned partnership with Expedia Travel.
- The Best List Awards program scheduled for February 1, 2018 at the Mahaffey Theater.

#### Digital/Web

Mr. Bridges conducted the Digital/Web portion of the presentation, reiterated a point by Mr. Downing that everything VSPC does touches digital, and discussed the following:

- The team's 360-degree videos of meeting spaces and virtual reality headsets for remote viewing.
- Tailoring of the website home page to provide an experience specific to the user.
- A relationship with the travel and tourism marketing company Miles Travel and a related pilot program with Google.
- Influencing the destination's points of interest shown through mediums such as Google, Facebook, and YouTube to show the best attributes.

Mr. Downing thanked Mr. Bridges and distributed a booklet titled *Annual Plan 2017-2018* to the members.

#### PRESENTATION TO CHAIR

Mr. Downing thanked Chair Long for her leadership and energy in 2017 and presented her with a plaque expressing the gratitude of VSPC and the TDC for her service; whereupon, the two posed for a photograph, and Chair Long commented that she had a wonderful experience working with staff and the members.

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INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT REPORTS – NO PRESENTATIONS; REPORTS ON FILE

Reports for St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport and Tampa International Airport are available on the TDC website.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

The members thanked Chair Long for her leadership, praised Mr. Downing and the VSPC staff for their dedication and professionalism, and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Councilman Gerdes related that the St. Petersburg City Council has added four legislative assistants this year and recognized two who were in attendance; whereupon, Chair Long congratulated them and stated that they could reach out to her assistant, Doyle Walsh, with any County-related questions.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Long adjourned the meeting at 10:59 A.M.